



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2022

Biodiversity and the Plague Ape – with Special Reference to Invertebrates

Max Campbell

March 9, 2022

Max Campbell has been President of Field Naturalists Club of Victoria for 8 years, and a member for 50 years. He has been travelling all over Victoria for some years, giving this talk and trying to raise people's understanding of our environmental catastrophe. He was booked to speak to us in 2020, and again in 2021, so we were greatly pleased to finally welcome him. His particular interests are invertebrates, photography and microscopy.

He started with the common fallacies:

- Humans have the capacity to fully restore biodiversity and complex ecosystems.
- Humans have any real understanding of the biosphere.
- Nature can be managed and controlled.
- Biodiversity largely involves vertebrates ("animals").
- Organisms are stand-alone species.
- The principles of Neo Liberal Economics can be applied to Nature. i.e. The environment and ecosystems can be treated like financial systems, regarded as tradeable/interchangeable assets - offsets and credits.
- Plants do not communicate across the ecosystem; actually inseparably integrated.

He quoted Greta Thunberg, 'Fairytale of eternal economic growth'. Another quote: Capitalism and globalisation – "an insatiable consumption of resources founded on a suicidal imperative to unbridled growth on a limited terrestrial resource base". Leon Fuerth

Topics

1. The Nature of Biodiversity
2. Human Impacts on Biodiversity
3. Symbiosis and relationships
4. Who are the invertebrates?
5. Summary

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things, and their relationships. No organism lives alone, there are no stand alone species. Symbiosis is the mutually beneficial and essential relationships between organisms. For example, plants with mycorrhizal fungi. Termites, beetles and fungi. Ruminant animals with microbial, protozoan and fungal interactions.

The Kingdoms are:

- Monera- Bacteria and Archaeobacteria
- Protoctista- Unicellular organisms, such as amoeba, diatoms and slime moulds
- Fungi- mushrooms, yeast, moulds
- Animalia
- Plantae

Within Animalia, invertebrates are 99.5% of the total, leaving Chordates (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals) at a mere .63%. Chordates dominate our thinking, but they are a miniscule proportion of the animal kingdom. We do not pay enough attention to the 99.5%- 'the spineless are going under'.

Insectageddon- the dramatic drop (76%) in insect catches documented in Germany since 1985 has been recognised, but the significance is still registering. For example, losing pollinators is reducing crop yields.

Human Impacts on Biodiversity-

- Deforestation
- Urbanisation /development /gardening
- Mining – catastrophic scale – deforestation – toxic residues -wastes
- Major infrastructure roads, railways, buildings – production of concrete
- Waste production and disposal
- Nuclear technology (Chernobyl)
- Military activity – thousands of years – defoliation – environmental destr.
- Control burning
- Energy production
- Chemical pollution
- Artificial lighting 24/7 including Off-Grid LEDs
- Unrelenting loud noise – air, water and land
- Walls, fences and other barriers
- Gene Technology
- Ecotourism/tourism – huge pressure on shrinking resources
- Agricultural practices (monocultures and feed lots)
- Pest control methods. Pesticides/Herbicides – environmental persistence
- Irresponsible use of Antibiotics
- Climate Change. Humans produce 5X volcanic CO2 which is natural level.
- Exposure of life to Radio-Frequency Electromagnetic Fields. 2-120 GHz
- Fragmentation of ecosystems
- Draining of wetlands
- Use of fertilisers
- Feral/introduced organisms
- Global spread of pathogens
- Introduction of hormone disrupters – plastics – whipper snippers.
- Globalisation and neoliberal economics – infinite growth – limited resources
- Natural medicine – use of animals for dubious folk remedies – tigers, bears, large cats and rhinos etc
- Trafficking in Wildlife

- Hunting/fishing/foraging/harvesting wild food/ bush meat
- Human overpopulation and altered land use
- Fashion, status, unrealistic aesthetics/standards and their impacts
- Dam construction – killing of river systems and wetlands
- Flagrantly action-oriented, misguided, uneducated political leaders
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Many of these activities are interlinked and their effects are accumulative, amplified by human overpopulation.

Who Are the Invertebrates?

Max then ran through the extraordinary variety and numbers of invertebrate families.

- Platyhelminthes- flatworms
- Nematodes- known to gardeners as vegetable pests, but these are a minute fraction of nematodes
- Rotifers- microscopic aquatic animals
- Gastrotricha – ‘hairybacks’ – wormlike aquatic animals
- Tardigrades- ‘water bears’ – live in mosses in symbiotic relationships- 8 legged segmented microanimals
- Molluscs – such as snails, slugs, many rock pool animals
- Leeches
- Worms
- Peripatus – velvet worms
- Arachnids- scorpions and spiders
- Mites – of countless number
- Myriapods- many legs- such as millipedes and centipedes
- Hexapods

This was an introduction to animals not seen or recognised by most of us, and many only seen under microscopes.

Insects:

Starting with Bristletails & silverfish, and working through dragonflies, cockroaches, mantids, cicadas, bugs, dipteras, flies, wasps, bees, ants, crickets, thrips and moths & butterflies.

Life on Earth in summary

It is a diverse and complex system of inter-connected organisms and their physical environment. There is no certainty about the total number of species on Earth. No species lives alone in isolation. Symbiosis impacts all life on Earth. (Microbiomes reflect the complexity of the broader ecosystem.)

The complexity of living things and their mutual interactions is poorly known and impossible to replicate and therefore restore. Biodiversity is the result of at least 3.5 billion years of evolution. Ecosystems take thousands if not millions of years to evolve and their complete restoration would require omnipotence and a level of knowledge and understanding beyond human capacity.

Life evolved through a succession of complex unpredictable processes and convenient circumstances in fortuitous order. Once destroyed the chances of restoring it are remote if not impossible. Life on Earth is far more complex, fragile, unmanageable and reactive than we like to imagine; perhaps yet another inconvenient truth to be considered.

Another quote: “Our economy is at war with many forms of life on Earth, including human life. What the climate needs is a contraction in humanity’s use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it is not the Laws of Nature.”—Naomi Klein.

Our survival depends upon a healthy environment – clean air, potable water, a sustainably reliable food supply and a healthy ecosystem.—**Judy Smart**

Lysterfield Lake 19th March

Four members travelled to this very popular recreational reserve on a perfect day for it—an idea shared by a great number of others, including walkers, joggers, cyclists, sailors, canoists and paddleboarders. There might even have been a couple of swimmers. Everyone was quite relaxed though, and the circuit track is wide enough that the joggers and cyclists were not inconvenienced by wandering field naturalists travelling at a snails pace while looking around them.

At around 1400 hectares, Lysterfield Park is much more than the Lake. It includes sections of native bush, as well as areas of plantations of River Red Gum, Southern Mahogany, Spotted Gum, Swamp Gum, Blue Gum, Forest Red Gum, Long-leaved Box and Sugar Gum. It joins onto another Parks Victoria reserve, Churchill National Park (270 Ha), to the west, which is connected via Police

Paddocks to the Dandenong Creek corridor extending far into the south-eastern suburbs. To the north-east it abuts the Yarra Ranges Shire reserve Birdland, which covers another 75 Ha. A large mob of kangaroos ranges across the area, particularly between Lysterfield and Churchill NP, but on this visit we only spotted one of them.

For this visit we stuck to the circuit track, which is 5.5 kilometres and crosses the dam wall. The time estimate for this track is 1.5 hours, but not for field naturalists. This track does not actually give many views of the lake; there are a few side tracks leading down to short jetties, but for the most part the track is lined by bush on both sides—except on the dam wall and the picnic ground.

We headed off from the car park to circumnavigate the lake in an anticlockwise direction, seeing a few birds on the way.

At the northern end, after spotting a mistletoe specialist Spotted Jezebel butterfly we realised that we hadn't noticed much mistletoe—after that we looked out for it but still didn't see much—a few clumps of Drooping Mistletoe.



Blue Skimmer Orthetrum caledonicum
Reiner Richter calls it 'the most photographed dragonfly in Australia'

Dragonflies were active when we got down to the water, but birds were scarce. On previous visits we had seen Great Crested Grebe at the northern end which is theoretically off-limits for watercraft, although canoeists and paddleboarders didn't seem to be taking much notice of that. No grebes today. There were a few Musk Ducks, both at the northern end and next to the dam wall, a few cormorants and ducks (mostly near the picnic ground) and bush birds including Rufous Whistler, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, the usual large birds, and small birds including Fairy Wrens, Scrubwrens and Pardalotes. The final tally of 31 was the same as for our previous visit, much the same birds.



Any Clues?

On the western side of the Lake there is a walking track that gets you off the main circuit track. Called the Acacia Nature Walk, the most notable feature on this day was passing through an avenue of Drooping Cassinia (*C. arcuata*) filling the air with its mild curry fragrance. Here also we saw some cottony growths on the trees that looked like the work of some insect—any suggestions as to the origin of these, shown in the photo above, would be welcomed.

According to the *Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park Management Plan* released by Parks Victoria in August 1998, Lysterfield Park was listed as a regional site of botanical significance by the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Authority, with 167 native species and more than 30 regionally significant species that are uncommon in both the Eastern Highlands and Gippsland. On our next visit we should explore more of the Park.—

Text and photos by Lee Denis



On the Acacia Nature Trail

On Reef Island Among Sea-creatures 7th March

It was an ideal, partly cloudy day, with a temperature in the low twenties, for a walk along the isthmus and rock pooling. Low tide was about 11am and limited our staying longer, but it was enough.

Kennedy or Stony Point is a low promontory in Coronet Bay with beaches of coarse angular fragments of

ferruginized basalt and sandstone. Gravelly ridges extend seaward from Kennedy Point and connect Reef Island and the point at low tide. Reef Island is an island at high tide but at low tide we can walk across a rocky tidal flat and the island becomes a narrow peninsula.

Both the point and Reef Island consist of Older Volcanics

basalt overlain by a veneer of Tertiary clayey gravels, sandy gravels and sands. Poorly preserved occasional marine fossils from Early to Middle Miocene could be spotted.

The beach is covered with red iron-rich 'Buckshot Gravel' [a very small granular rock with rounded edges that is not

crushed. It is smaller than pea gravel], produced by weathering of the underlying basalt. Most of them are magnetic.

Some highlights of the day are pictured.—**Text and photos by Velimir Dragic**



Boring Venus Shell
Irus crenatus
(Family Veneridae)



Hercules Club Mud Whelk
Pyrasus ebeninus
(Family Batillariidae)



Bristle Cage Worm
Flabelligera bicolor
(Family Flabelligeriidae)



Leathery Sea Slug
Onchidella nigricans
(Family Onchidiidae)

SEANA Camp Portland 25-28 March

This year's camp was hosted by the Portland Field Naturalists Club. The venue was Portland Bay Lodge, 9km east of Portland and just over the road from the beach. Numbers were limited to about 80, with 5 members of our club attending. It's always good fun catching up with fellow Field Nats. from other clubs across Victoria.



Mt Richmond

Speakers for the 3 evenings were Mr. Gavin Prentice, with a presentation on the Discovery Bay RAMSAR site near the Glenelg Estuary, Dr. John Sherwood speaking about the coastal geology of the area and Mr. Martin Boyer, a local historian, member of the Friends of the Surry and the 'Riverkeeper' of the Surry. A variety of full day and half day excursions over the weekend kept us busy:- Mt. Clay and Cobboboonee National Park for fauna and flora, Piccaninnie Ponds/Picks Swamp for birds, Budj Bim Indigenous Cultural Tour of Lake Condah and the Surry River Estuary. These were escorted excursions with leaders, but we also had the option of visiting other local sites on self-guided outings with comprehensive

information and maps supplied. Interesting locations included Mt. Richmond National Park, Cape Bridgewater, Cape Nelson Lighthouse and Clifftop Nature Walk and Mt. Eccles volcano.

Velimir and I decided to 'do our own thing' on Saturday; our first site was Mt. Richmond, to the west of Portland; it's an extinct?? volcanic cone almost completely covered with wind-blown sand, carried from the exposed continental shelf during lowered sea level stages. The forested slopes are an interesting mix of species:- Brown Stringybark, Manna Gum (with Koalas), Shiny-leaf Peppermint and Swamp Gum. Familiar species, often seen on the Mornington Peninsula, includes Grasstrees, Silver Banksia, Honey-pots, Showy Bossiaea (Egg N Bacon), Correa, Sweet Bursaria and Horny Cone-bush. There is only a very small exposure of the underlying volcanic tuff at the summit so most of the vegetation is suited to the sand. The area is rich in wildflowers, with about 450 species recorded, including 50 orchids; a visit in springtime would be wonderful. The highlight was a delightful encounter with a Red-necked Wallaby close to the road, we stopped and a few times it hopped a metre or so, then paused to look at us.

Our focus for the afternoon was the geology of the Portland Peninsula. It is a plateau of New Volcanics lava, with the bays along the south coast formed by 4 breached and submerged calderas. The volcanic layers were later covered by sand which hardened into Dune Limestone (Calcarenite) and capped by hard Calcrete. The black basalt forms narrow shore platforms at the base of the cliffs of Cape Bridgewater and Cape Nelson. These are the highest sea cliffs in Victoria.

After a brief look at Tarragal Cave, cut into the Calarenite escarpment we visited Whites Beach at the N.W. end of

Cape Bridgewater where Velimir searched the beach for interesting shells and I did a bit of birdwatching. Only saw the usual gulls but I did hear the distinctive call of the Rufous Bristlebird which kept me busy scanning the dense coastal heath for this elusive bird. NO LUCK.



Tarragal Cave

Our last stop for the day was the west coast of the cape where the shore platform is formed by a pavement of planed-off hexagonal basalt columns, being pounded by the breaking waves and gleaming in the late afternoon sun.



Basalt column pavement, Cape Bridgewater

The overlying calcarenite layer has an interesting feature called the 'Petrified Forest', various theories as to the formation of it include: Moonah trees being smothered by sand, then water seeped down and formed a crust of sandstone around the trunks, branches and roots. The wood has rotted away, leaving the tubes. The cover of soft sand has been stripped away by the wind leaving these calcified pillars of the 'forest'. Another explanation: the hollow tubes of limestone are 'Solution Pipes', eroded by rainfall over thousands of years. Water collects in shallow depressions in sand and seeps down, dissolving the limestone. The mineral-saturated water cements the sand, forming hard trunk-shaped pipes. On Cape Bridgewater most pipes are 1

-3m high, with a few standing at 20m. Both theories are plausible but the 'Vanished Forest' is more appealing.

For Sunday morning we joined an excursion group to the Surry Estuary which is habitat for a range of waterbirds, Singing Honeyeaters in dune vegetation and Hooded Plovers on the beach.

In the afternoon we set off on another self-guided adventure, this time to Cape Nelson State Park. The coastal reserve protects a modest woodland of Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) and the rare Soap Mallee (*Eucalyptus diversifolia*), the only occurrence of this species in Victoria—it also grows in S.E. South Australia. The 90 min. loop track of the Sea Cliff Nature Walk winds through the forest with the vegetation decreasing in height as we neared the spectacular cliffs. We emerged onto a bleak, windy clifftop where the hard calccrete surface supports miniature species of Moonah, White Correa, Coastal Cushionbush etc., all wind-pruned by the strong salt-laden gusts. Some plants take refuge in hollows formed by solution weathering of the limestone surface.



Petrified Forest

Cape Bridgewater is home to a breeding colony of Australian Fur Seals and Long-nosed Fur Seals and they can also been seen from various sites near Cape Nelson. Both capes provide one of the few locations on land where it is possible to see albatross from late autumn to the end of spring.

The Portland club is only small with a limited number of leaders and facilitators, the option of Self-guided excursions expanded our choices. For Velimir and I this was mostly new territory, (I visited the area about 20 years ago). So with information and maps, our joint navigation skills on the back roads and our curiosity, we found all our intended locations—with only one unplanned detour.

My thanks to the Portland Field Nats. Club for an interesting and enjoyable weekend.—**Text and photos by Heather Ducat**

In Search Of Marine Fauna On The Portland Coastline

This SEANA Autumn camp in Portland gave Heather and me the opportunity to do some self-guided tours and roam along the Discovery Bay and its caldera shaped bays, capes, cliffs and beaches. My friend, Heather, will write the geological report and I will take a closer look at some molluscs I came across in the surrounding area.

Mouth of Hopkins River and rocky headland of the Point Ritchie/Moyjil

On our way to Portland we stopped in Warrnambool at Point Ritchie (Aboriginal name Moyjil) next to the Hopkins River Estuary where on calcrete dune sand I collected the first bunch of shells and some weathered limestone with features similar to Petrified Forest.

- Tall-ribbed Limpet *Patelloida alticostata* [Family Lottiidae]
- Top Snail *Chlorodiloma adelaidae* [Family Trochidae]. This marine species is endemic to Australia and occurs in South Australia and Tasmania.

The next day we walked on Mt Richmond (an extinct volcano), went inside Tarragal Caves and had a break at Bridgewater Lakes where I had to have a very short lunch-time in order to have more time to search for miniature creatures on the muddy shoreline.

- *Glyptophysa* [Family Planorbidae]: a small to medium-sized sinistral (only left-handed) air-breathing freshwater snail found on water weeds and sand on the Southern Pacific.



- Small Pointed Snail *Cochlicella barbara* [Family Geomitridae]: This is an introduced species of small but very high-spired, air-breathing land snails.



- Pea Clam *Misculium tatariae* [Family Sphaeriidae] These very small freshwater clams known as Pill or Pea Clams are hermaphrodites with internal fertilization.



Still on the coastal cliffs of Bridgewater Bay, actually an ancient volcanic caldera, after visiting Petrified Forest and Blow Hole we turned to the opposite side, toward Discovery Bay in the west. We parked on the end of Amos Rd and walked down a 1km steep track (a part of the 250km long Great South West Walk) to a sandy White's Beach, the only rock shelf in the Portland region. The unpredictable sea during rock pooling and the advice to never turn my back to it, made me move from rocks and waves onto the sandy beach where I spotted mostly True

Limpets, Surfclams, Hoof Shells and Black Abalones.

- Scaly Limpet *Scutellastra peronii* [Family Patellidae] Found in south Australian coastal waters from South-east Queensland to Shark Bay in Western Australia.



- Blacklip Abalone *Haliotis rubra* [Family Haliotidae] The size of this Australian species of large edible sea snails is between 3.5-20 cm. They are endemic to Australia. There is a big abalone farm—Yumbah—between our camp and Surry River estuary.



- Surfclams *Mactra australis* [Family Mactridae] Species of a large genus of medium sized clams appeared in the Eocene about 50 Million years ago



Later, on Shelly Beach in Bridgewater Bay, with a stunning view of the rocks of the Seal Colony, I found banded Kelp Shells.



Shelly Beach

- Banded Kelp Shell *Bankivia fasciata* [Family Trochidae] The length of the shell varies between 15 and 20 mm; the thin imperforate, elongated shell has a turreted shape and variable shining coloration; it is polished and shining (spiral bands could be creamy, pink, purplish-red with narrow zigzag stripes; They can be found from NSW to South Australia.

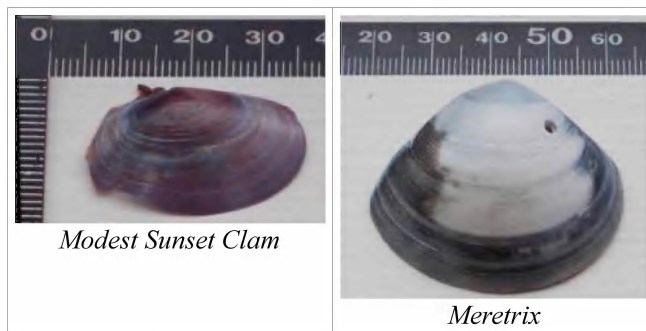
Surry River mouth and Narrawong Ocean Beach

On Sunday morning, on our third day we went on our only guided excursion to Surry River. At its estuary and on Narrawong Ocean Beach I continued my search for shells. At one moment a 'friendly' wave swooshed up to my knees, but I survived. The day was pretty hot and this incident was quite welcome. Most of the shells around were Black Lip

Abalones, Milky Tapes, Sunset Clams, Hoof Shells, Venus and Surf clams.

- Cone-shaped Hoof Shell *Sabia australis* [Family Hipponicidae] This species of small limpet-like sea snail is endemic to southern Australia and is also known as a 'Southern bonet-limpet'; Shell-length is about 25mm and it lives subtidally, attached to other snails and thus benefiting from the mobility and food-gathering behaviour of the host.
- Modest Sunset Clam *Gari modesta* [Family Psammobiidae] Sunset clams are a family of medium-sized saltwater clams in the order Cardiida.
- *Meretrix* [Family Veneridae] is a genus of edible saltwater Venus clams which appeared in the fossil

record in the Late Cretaceous, 90 Million years ago.



—Text and photos by Velimir Dragic

The Power of Regenerative Landscapes to Negate Climate Change

Ann Scholes

13th April

Ann wrote the discussion paper attached as an antidote to the overwhelming negativity of the battle to save our planet from climate change. She became disillusioned about the effectiveness of writing to politicians about climate change, and concerned that we are not providing young people with a positive message, only doom and gloom. Two books she read over summer inspired her, and she hopes to inspire others to action and hope.

Ann is a Mt Eliza environmentalist, who started by regenerating the bush around the Baden Powell Scout Group hall, then moved on to the beach at Williams Rd when the Baden Powell Scouts took on that space. The cliff top vegetation from Jacksons Rd to Ballar Creek is inspiring, and worth a visit. Ann has now passed the mantle to Melinda Gustus, and she is currently working on a small road reserve in Redbourne Ave Mt Eliza, improving its natural values.—Judy Smart

Good News Discussion Paper

For our High School Students

The Power of Regenerative Landscapes to Negate Climate Change

Discussion Paper for our Youth

I have decided that, for the future, I will substantially focus my climate change action on the potential power of regenerative landscapes to reverse this process. To this end, I wish to inspire and collaborate with others, particularly young people. In addition, I will continue trialling regenerative practices in my own garden.

While there are multiple books on the regeneration of landscapes and the natural harnessing and storage of carbon in terrestrial (or under-ground) ecosystems, the two books which I have read are The Call of the Reed Warbler by Charles Massy and For the Love of soils: Strategies to Regenerate our Food Production Systems, by Nicole Masters.

As an insight into these books, I have put together a few

quotes.

Massy states that “Modern grassland ecosystems are a potential carbon sink” and that the “great work of natural grasslands in the last forty million years has been undone by human exploitation of soils and fossil fuels”.

He goes on to state that regenerative agriculture is the “quickest and most efficient way of pulling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and storing carbon” and that “In turn this has enormous potential to address issues such as global warming and climate disruption”.

Massy also, refers to the 2009 Wentworth scientists’ paper, “Optimising Carbon in the Australian Landscape,” which states that “at a global scale, a fifteen per cent increase in the world’s terrestrial carbon stock would remove the equivalent of all the carbon pollution emitted from fossil fuels since the beginning of the industrial revolution.”

While this quote is not current, the implication is very clear and its potential highly exciting.

Having read Nicole Master’s book, I felt better equipped to make biological adjustments to my citrus and herb garden. My experiment involved injecting worm juice into hard, shallow, and wormless soils. I then added mushroom mulch, vermicast from my worm farm, followed by eucy-mulch.

These natural components should include large quantities of Mycorrhizal fungi which, in conjunction with plants, help create balanced and open soils with minerals, worms, insects, micro-animals, viruses and bacteria. Such systems play a crucial part in the uptake of carbon (stored energy) and the absorption of water.

To ensure Mycorrhizal fungi continue to thrive, I will minimize digging and soil compression. It is also worth noting that the viability of Mycorrhizal fungi relies heavily on the ongoing presence of plants. I am, therefore, trialling the use of perennial species which will act as Mycorrhizal fungi hosts. Herbs such as Rosemary are a perfect fit in my produce gardens.

Over 90% of plants, reference Masters, have this mutual

relationship with Mycorrhizal Fungi and associated soil organisms. However, this excludes banksia species. Unfortunately, last summer, three *Banksia marginata* died in my garden. Perhaps this is a coincidence? Regardless, remaining banksias have been treated with eucy-mulch to cool their roots and a range of deep-rooted perennials ground-flora, including indigenous grasses, will be added over coming months. These plants will help open-up the soil and maximize photosynthesis.

Finally, after reading these books, I have excluded all herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers from usage in my garden; I will enjoy life's natural cycles which often have the power to self-heal. Some of you may like to research Quorum Sensing?

Enough of my garden adventures. I hope that this information inspires you to undertake exploration in home gardens or natural reserves.

Good luck—**Ann Scholes**

Cape Schanck Excursion April 23, 2022

Apart from being a great place to go anytime, the plan for this excursion was to scope out a walk for our upcoming SEANA Camp. We often walk down to Fingal beach, to check out the geology, which is always interesting. But this time we were road testing the walk from Fingal car park (also known as The Pines car park), to Cape Schanck along the cliff top. Seven of us turned up on a beautiful sunny still autumn day.



Fingal Beach & Nepean Peninsula (Heather Ducat)

We started with the two lookouts near the car park, which have great views. Then it was off to Cape Schanck. There were a few more lookouts along the way, but not many, so you couldn't say it was spectacular. The birds were notably absent, we only saw 10 for the walk, and most of those were in the car parks. The bird of the day was a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater in the Cape Schanck car park, but the competition wasn't strong for the title. We did spot a Weasel Skink, who was duly admired.

Luckily the vegetation was interesting, although of course hardly anything was flowering, apart from *Correa alba*. Around the Fingal car park the weeds were rather overwhelming, especially the *Asparagus* creeper, but also *Polygala*, *Pittosporum undulatum* and *Acacia longifolia*. But once we moved on and saw past them, there were great

specimens of Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata* ssp. *lanceolata*), tall gnarled old *Leucopogon parviflorus*, Coast Wirilda (*Acacia uncifolia*), Coastal tea-tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) and *Banksia integrifolia*. The shrub layer had attractive plants such as Sea box (*Alyxia buxifolia*), *Pomaderris paniculosa* ssp. *paralia*, Thyme Rice-flower (*Pimelia serpyllifolia* ssp. *serpyllifolia*), which is characteristic of Coastal Moonah Woodland, silver Coast Daisy-bush (*Olearia axillaris*), Sticky Hop-bush (*Dodonaea viscosa* ssp. *spatulata*), and most interesting of all, Pale Turpentine-bush (*Beyeria lechenaultii*). We weren't familiar with this bush and had to look it up. It is common in the Mallee, and found along the coastlines of Victoria, NSW and SA. It has a fruit somewhat reminiscent of *Leucopogon parviflorus*, but quite different.

The main ground covers were Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*) and Seaberry Saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana* ssp. *candolleana*), but we also noticed Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*), *Ajuga australis*, and Coast Swainson-pea (*Swainsona lessertiifolia*), all waiting for Spring to flower.



Weasel Skink (Heather Ducat)

After discussion at lunchtime we concluded that it was an enjoyable walk, but we will be doing one of the alternative walks at our camp in October.—**Judy Smart**

Birding at The Briars 4th April

It had been four years since the club last visited The Briars, in March 2018. The report for that visit lists 36 birds, and remarks that there was not much happening—calling it ‘eerily quiet’, with the final tally coming as a bit of a surprise.

Eight members plus one guest found things much the same four years on, with a total this time of 40 birds, most as seen the last time. Both times there was a dearth of small honeyeaters (White-eared seen both times, New Holland seen in 2018) and very little water around. No raptors were seen this time (Swamp Harrier in 2018), but there were Black-fronted Dotterels seen from Chechingurk Hide.

The most notable bird seen was one we couldn’t identify, seen from Chechingurk Hide. We knew it was a cormorant of some kind, but what kind of cormorant escaped us—its colouring seemed all mixed up. Our friends at Peninsula Birdlife subsequently identified it as a ‘funny’ melanistic Little Pied Cormorant.—**Lee Denis**



North Western Port NCR 14th May

The North Westernport NCR consists of a series of disconnected parcels of land bordering Western Port Bay. This excursion visited two of them in the general area of Tyabb: one at the end of Yaringa Rd, and the other at the end of Bungower Rd. Both reserves are open to horse riding. In between lies Yaringa Boat Harbour, where we called in for lunch.



The section on Yaringa Rd abuts a Shire reserve called Gordon Rolfe Reserve, which basically consists of a wetland; in spring this wetland abounds with birds, but in autumn it is dry or nearly so, and not a single bird was seen on it—we found this to be the case on an autumn visit some years ago also.

According to the Parks Victoria sign at the entrance, The North Westernport NCR lies between Rolfe Reserve and the Bay; according to Google Maps, the section abutting Rolfe Reserve is called the Tyabb Foreshore Reserve, (presumably a Shire reserve) which extends to the edge of the intertidal zone; the intertidal zone is called the Western Port Coastal Reserve. The Parks Victoria website carries no information whatsoever about these two sections of reserve; ditto the Mornington Shire website.

Whatever it’s called, one of the attractions in spring is the number of orchids; at the time of this visit only leaves were seen of Nodding and Blunt Greenhoods; Tiny Greenhoods and a great many Mosquito Orchids were in bud. This section had a fire a few years ago, and that part is thick with Coast Tea Tree.

The intertidal zone consists of a narrow Beaded Glasswort (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*) zone adjacent to a band of Swamp Paper-bark above tide level, with a wide Shrubby Glasswort (*Tecticornia arbuscula*) zone to seaward, and a distant fringe of mangroves. The prostrate Beaded Glasswort stores salt in its succulent stems, which become bright red at the end of summer before dying off during the winter to be replaced by fresh green growth.

Nothing much was seen on the salt marsh apart from a startled White-faced Heron. Bird count for the reserve amounted to about 20.

We added a couple of new birds at Yaringa Boat Harbour, including Pacific Gull, before heading off to the other section of the NCR at the end of Bungower Road. Possibly the bush up to the salt marsh is a Shire reserve also—not even Google Maps gives it a name. Here the vegetation is less choked with Coast Tea Tree, being mostly a sandy heath community. Notable here is the occurrence of Pale-fruited Ballart (*Exocarpus strictus*) as well as the more familiar Cherry Ballart (*E. cupressiformis*). Both have edible ‘fruit’ (actually the flower stem which looks like fruit, but the actual fruit is attached to the end of it, hence the generic name).—I think that the fruit of the former is more pleasant in taste.

As at the first site, Mosquito and Tiny Greenhood orchids were abundant, many in bud.

The intertidal zone here is quite different, with a wide area of bare mud where there is an inlet from the Bay. To the east, across Watson Inlet, it is a short distance to Quail Island. The intertidal zone would be much less energetic here, which would account for the wider extent.

The birds were much the same as at the first reserve, except for some excitement when Leanne thought she spotted a Mistletoebird in a large patch of mistletoe on the edge of the saltmarsh. After much scanning, eventually we all saw it—a brightly coloured male. Our bird tally for the day was 28. A spot worth visiting in spring—**Text and photos by Lee Denis**



Birding At Seaford Wetland 2nd. May, 2022

Nine club members gathered at the Austin Rd. viewing platform on a mild, cloudy morning, with only a moderate breeze - most unusual for the swamp, it's usually blowing a gale and freezing cold. Each May our target bird here is the Flame Robin and for the first time in many years, we failed to see ANY! ! I have been checking their usual haunts for a few weeks, no luck so far but I'm hoping that the mild weather has tempted them to stay in the high country for a bit longer. Now with the chilly conditions, they'll be heading for their winter hangout.

The water level has been boosted by recent rain but few waterbirds were seen at Austin Rd. Some Darters circling high overhead were an unusual sight at Seaford and we could hear the low plaintive call of a Little Grassbird in the reeds. The eastern side of the swamp is a reliable location for Red-browed Finch, Superb Fairywren and honeyeaters - New Holland, White-plumed, Spiny-cheeked, Red and Little Wattlebirds - all ticked on our list. Eastern Spinebills were feeding in big *Correa reflexa*, which are in good condition and smothered in yellow flowers, after the rain.

Fewer people use the eastern (Old Wells Rd.) side and the quiet, bushy vegetation is home to Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Fantail, Brown Thornbill and Golden Whistler. Occasionally we see Crested Shrike-tit, but not today. From the fence we had a distant view of the central lagoon, recording about 12 Black-winged Stilts, a few Australian Shelducks and Chestnut Teals.

The Centre Track across the swamp has been closed for 2 - 3 years, but the locked gate does not deter some people. A hole has been cut in the wire at ground level, so I slithered

through and checked the track for Flame Robins, still no luck but I was rewarded with a wonderful view of a Whistling Kite circling low over the reeds. Others searched the fenceline and grassy area near Down's Estate for Robins - NONE were found.

We backtracked to Austin Rd. and after lunch a few keen members walked part of the western side, adding some extra waterbirds to our list, including 2 species of Grebe. Our total for the day was a respectable 47 species.

Occasionally, cloud formations over the wide open reed beds are amazing—everchanging, my swamp is never boring—**Heather Ducat**



Heather Ducat

Desert Birding – Strzelecki Track and Other Places

Tania Ireton

11th May, 2022

Tania is President of the Birdlife Bayside Group, and an enthusiastic traveller, photographer and speaker. This is her 4th presentation to us. Tania visited the desert with a tour group, Phil and Trish Maher from Australasian Ornithological Services, in August 2007. They travelled by mini bus from Melbourne to the Strzelecki Desert and back via the Flinders Ranges, over 19 days.



Plains-wanderer (All photos by Tania Ireton)

They started at Deniliquin, spotlighting at night for Plains-wanderer and Stubble Quail. Along the Kidman Way to Hillston they saw a pair of Barking Owls, as well as Whistling Kite. At Nombinnie Nature Reserve they found Grey-fronted Honeyeaters, Red-capped Robins and Splendid Fairy-wrens, as Tania said, the same colours as our Superb Fairy-wrens, but much brighter. Yellow Rosellas were thought to be potentially a separate species to Crimson Rosellas, but research has found that they are the same species, their colour determined by their habitat—Crimson Rosellas in the shady hill country, Yellow in the arid areas, and the Adelaide Rosella an orange in between shade.



Grey-fronted Honeyeaters

At Bourke they saw Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, Apostle Bird, Australian Bustards, and a Bearded Dragon on the road. On to Cunnamulla, and Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, Collared Sparrowhawk, Purple-backed Fairy-wren, Major Mitchell Cockatoos, and the elusive Grey Falcon.



Grey Falcon

The gibber plains seem like unlikely birding habitat, but there they saw a feast of birds: Bourke's Parrot, Inland Dotterel, Budgerigars breeding in the thousands, Owllet-nightjar, Orange Chat, and most unexpectedly, a pair of Brolga. Flock Bronzewing, a beautiful bird, were in flocks.

At Bollards Lagoon in the Strzelecki Desert they saw the first of the many Grasswrens they were to see: Eyrean, along with Crimson Chat, which is somewhat misnamed, being a ground dwelling, insect eating honeyeater. Black Falcon, which is a specialist bird hunter. Also Red-browed Pardalote, Black-breasted Buzzard and Letter-winged Kites.



Crimson Chat

They stayed at Mt Lyndhurst Station, and saw Rufous Fieldwren, Thick-billed Grasswren, Chestnut-breasted Whiteface and Chirruping Wedgebill. (Writer's note- why do these birds have such long names?)

Next stop was the Prairie Hotel at Parachilna, a popular stop in the northern Flinders Ranges. At Brachina Gorge there were Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies, Elegant Parrot and a father Emu with chicks.

Tania remarked that they spent a lot of time in spinifex, and even with legs covered ended up with spikes in her legs. Next time she would wear gaiters. In the spinifex at Hawker they found the Short-tailed Grasswren, and in what looked like a nondescript patch of smoke bush, Mulga Parrot and Black-eared Cuckoo.

The Billiatt Conservation Park in SA is west of Victoria's Big Desert, and there they saw Red-lored Whistler, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Striated Grasswren, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Mallee Emu-wren. As Tania remarked, the trip was a feast of wrens.

Finally, at Newstead on the way home they saw a Powerful Owl, to round the trip off. Altogether over 19 days Tania saw 250 bird species, including 13 new ones for her.

PS Since her talk Tania has booked onto Bellbird Tours

Comfortable 9 Grasswren Tour at the end of July, a 16 day trip from Mt Isa to Adelaide, going through much the same countryside as her talk. More Grasswrens coming up!—

Judy Smart



Splendid Fairy-wren

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website.

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